

slowed and finally halted the German advance to the east. More serious for the knights was their defeat in 1410 at Tannenberg Forest in Prussia by a Polish-Lithuanian army led by Prince Vytautas (r. 1392–1439) of Lithuania. The reign of Prince Vytautas represented the high point of Lithuanian dominion. He ruled much of modern Poland and western Russia as well as modern Lithuania.

During the fifteenth century, Lithuania faced a formidable new opponent, the grand duchy of Moscow. Since the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century, various Russian towns and principalities had been part of a Mongolian sphere of influence. With the waning of Mongol control, however, the Muscovites annexed other Russian territories. By 1478, Ivan III (r. 1462–1505), called “the Great,” had taken control of the famed trading center of Novgorod. Two years later he was powerful enough to renounce Mongol overlordship and refuse further payments of tribute. After marriage to an émigré Byzantine princess living in Rome, Ivan began to call himself “Tsar” (Russian for “Caesar”), implying that in the wake of the Muslim conquest of Constantinople, Moscow had become the new Rome.

The stability resulting from the rise of Moscow enabled itinerant Russian warriors called *boyars* to transform themselves into landed aristocrats. The boyars came to play a dominant political, institutional, and legal role in provincial society through their control of provincial assemblies, or dumas. They used their political power to dominate the countryside and force formerly free peasants into a harsh serfdom from which the Russian peasantry would not emerge until the nineteenth century. It is too early to speak of a Russian national state, yet by 1500 the seeds of Russian dominion were clearly sown.

By 1500 it did seem that the French king’s lawyer’s claim that all within the kingdom belonged to the king was finally accepted. With the exception of Italy and Germany, central monarchies emerged from the wars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries much stronger. The Hundred Years’ War and the resulting disorganization and unrest in France and England seemed to strike at the heart of the monarchies. But through the foundation of standing armies and the careful consolidation of power in the royal court, both countries seemed stronger and more able to defend themselves after the war. And as the Italians learned

in the wars following the French invasion of 1494, small regional states were no match for the monarchies. In part, Italians found that the economic and social changes of the late Middle Ages favored northern Europe rather than the regional governments of Italy.

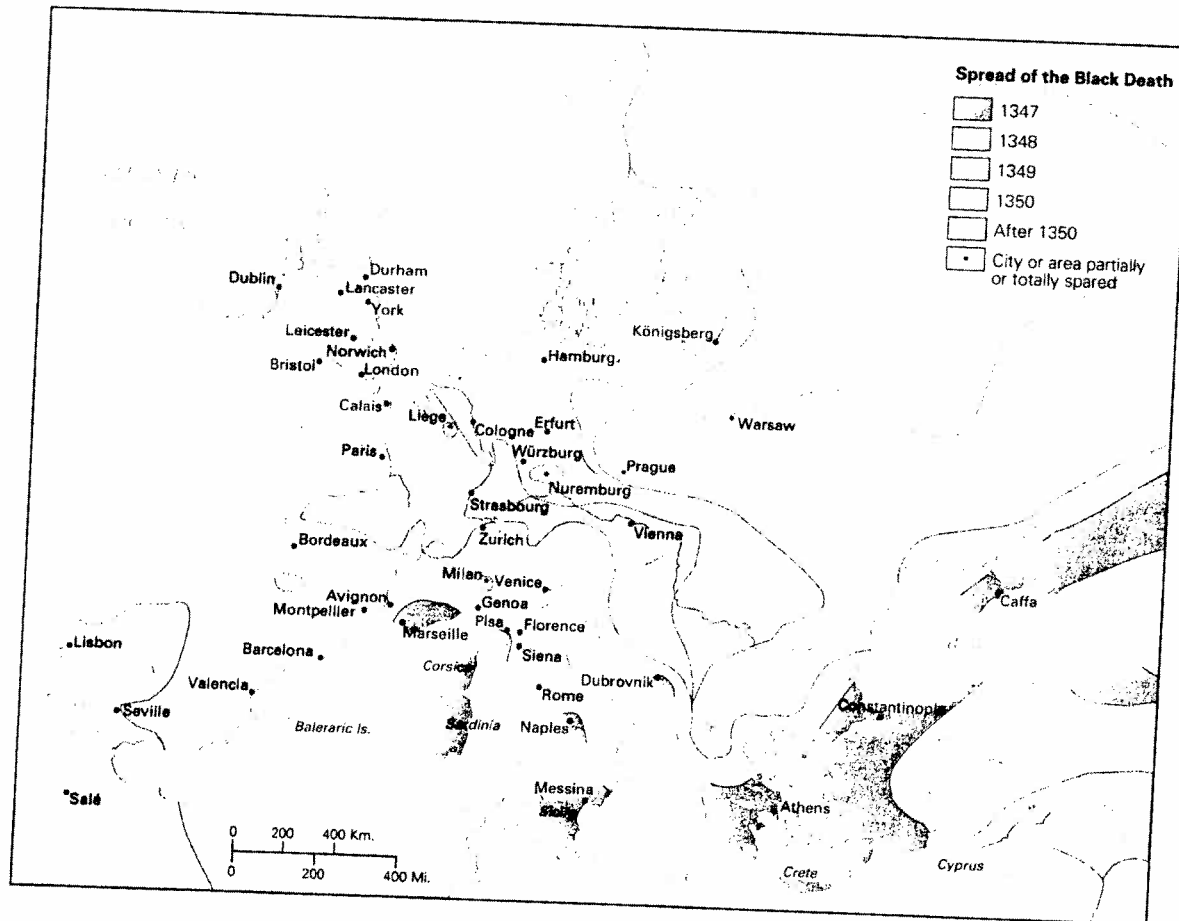
## ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

After nearly three centuries of dramatic growth, European society in 1300 was overpopulated and threatened by drastic economic and social problems. Estimates of Europe’s population in 1300 have ranged from about 80 million to as high as 100 million. Levels would not be this high again for over two hundred years. Opportunities dwindled because of overpopulation, war, and epidemics. These shocks brought changes in trade and commerce. Lowered population, deflation, and transformed patterns of consumption also altered the nature of agriculture, which was still the foundation of the European economy. Changes brought on by wars, plagues, and religious controversy affected the structure and dynamics of families, the organization of work, and the culture in many parts of Europe.

### The Black Death and Demographic Crisis

People in many parts of Europe were living on the edge of disaster in 1300. Given the low level of agricultural technology and the limited resources available, it became increasingly difficult for the towns and countryside to feed and support the growing population. The nature of the problem varied from place to place. There is evidence of a crisis of both births and deaths.

Growing numbers of people competed for land to farm and for jobs. Farm size declined throughout Europe as parents divided their land among their children. Rents for farmland increased as landlords found they could play one land-hungry farmer off against another. Competition for jobs kept wages low, and when taxes were added to high rents and low wages, many peasants and artisans found it difficult to marry and raise families. Thus, because of reduced opportunities brought on by overpopulation, poor townsmen and peasants tended to marry late and have small families.



**Map 11.2 The Progress of the Black Death** The Black Death did not advance evenly across Europe; rather, as is clear from the dates at which it struck various regions, it followed the main lines of trade and communication.

More dramatic than this crisis of births were the famines that occurred in years of bad harvests. The great famine of 1315–1322 marks a turning point in the economic history of Europe. Wet and cold weather ruined crops in much of northern Europe. Food stocks were quickly exhausted, and mass starvation followed. People died so quickly, English chroniclers reported, that no one could keep up with the burials. At Ypres, in Flanders, 2800 people (about 10 percent of the population) died in just six months. And shortages continued. Seven other severe famines were reported in the south of France during the fourteenth century.

If Europe's problem had merely been one of famine brought on by overpopulation, recovery

should have been possible. But, because of the return of a deadly epidemic disease, the economy did not recover. In 1348 bubonic plague returned to western Europe for the first time in six hundred years. Genoese traders contracted the plague in Caffa on the Black Sea coast. Infected sailors carried the disease south into Egypt and west to Sicily and then on to Genoa and Venice. From there it followed established trade routes first into central Italy and later to the south of France, the Low Countries, England, and finally through the North and Baltic Seas into Germany and the Slavic lands to the east (Map 11.2).

The bacillus that caused "the great Mortality," as contemporaries called it, was *Yersinia pestis*. In

its bubonic form, the plague attacks the lymphatic system, bringing painful, discolored swelling under the armpits and in the groin or lower abdomen. Some who survived the first days of high fever and internal hemorrhaging caused by the swellings recovered from the bubonic plague. No one, however, survived the rarer pneumonic or septicemic forms of the plague, which attacked the lungs and circulatory system. Mortality rates varied, but generally 60 percent or more of those infected died. In the initial infestation of 1348–1351, from 25 to 35 percent of Europe's population may have died. In some of Europe's larger cities the figures may have risen to as high as 60 percent. In Florence, the population probably declined from about 90,000 to 50,000 or even less. (See the box, "The Black Death.") And the nearby town of Siena likely fared even worse, with a total mortality of 55 percent in the town and its suburbs.

After the initial outbreak, the plague returned again in 1363, and then for three centuries thereafter almost no generation could avoid it. Less is known about the plague in Muslim lands and in the eastern Mediterranean, but the situation seems to be similar to the European experience. Because the plague tended to carry off the young, the almost generational return of the disease accounts for the depressed population levels found in many parts of Europe and western Asia until the late seventeenth or eighteenth century.

Lacking an understanding of either contagion or infection, fourteenth-century doctors depended on traditional theories inherited from the Greeks, especially the work of Galen. In Galenic medicine good health was a condition that depended on the proper balance of hot and cold, moist and dry bodily fluids, or humors. It was believed that this balance could be upset by corrupt air, the movements of planets, and even violent shifts in emotions. Without a clear understanding of the biological nature of the disease and lacking modern antibiotics, Europeans were unable to treat plague effectively. Yet in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as the rhythms of the plague infestations became clearer, towns and, later, territorial governments perceived the contagious nature of the disease. Officials instituted increasingly effective quarantines and embargoes to restrict the movement of goods and people from areas where the plague was raging.

Alongside medical theory, however, another class of explanations developed. Taking a lead from miracle stories in which Jesus linked illness and sin, many Christians considered the "great Mortality" a signal of the end of the world or at least a sign of the severe judgment of God on a sinful world. A traditional religious response was to urge various moral reforms or penitential acts—charitable gifts, special prayers, processions. (See the feature, "Weighing the Evidence: A Painting of the Plague," on pages 434–435.) Women were often thought to be a source of moral pollution and hence one of the causes of God's wrath. In Muslim Egypt women were ordered off the streets; in Christian Europe prostitutes were driven out of towns.

A movement of penitents called "flagellants" arose in Hungary and spread quickly into Germany and across France and the Low Countries. These men and women moved from town to town urging repentance and social and political reconciliation. In an imitation of Christ's life and sufferings, they ritually beat ("flagellated") themselves between the shoulders with metal-tipped whips. The flagellants, in their quest for a purer, truly Christian society, brought suspicion on all those who were not Christian or were otherwise suspect.

In some parts of Europe there were murderous attacks on outsiders, especially lepers and Jews, who were suspected of spreading the contagion in an attempt to bring down Latin Christian civilization. Like many of the anti-Semitic myths, the stories of Jewish poisoners seemed to arise in the south of France and spread in their most virulent forms to German towns along the Rhine. In many Rhineland towns, the entire Jewish population was put to the sword. In Strasbourg, attacks on Jews even preceded the arrival of plague. Except in a few districts, officials opposed attacks on Jews, lepers, and heretics. After a few months of violence, the flagellants and the leaders of the religious riots were driven from towns.

It was a commonplace among contemporary chroniclers that "so many did die that everyone thought it was the end of the world." Yet it was the young, the elderly, and the poor—those least likely to pay taxes, own shops, or produce new children—who were the most common victims. Even in towns like Florence, however, where mortality rates were so high, recovery was rapid. Government offices were closed at most for only a few

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## The Black Death



*The plague of 1348 in Florence dominates the popular tales that form the bulk of the Decameron. Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) probably described the plague to emphasize how unusual and irresponsible his protagonists—young men and women who fled Florence, abandoning family and friends—really were. If so, Boccaccio failed miserably. Readers celebrate the fresh and lively irony of the tales. Moreover, Boccaccio's description fits with everything scholars have since discovered about the first infestation of the plague in Italy. Boccaccio's descriptions make clear not just what happened, but how the events affected the sensibilities of the people.*

This pestilence was so powerful that it was transmitted to the healthy by contact with the sick, the way a fire close to dry or oily things will set them aflame. And the evil of the plague went even further: not only did talking to or being around the sick bring infection and a common death, but also touching the clothes of the sick or anything touched or used by them seemed to communicate this very disease to the person involved. . . . There came about such fear and such fantastic notions among those who remained alive that almost all of them took a very cruel attitude in the matter; that is, they completely avoided the sick and their possessions; and in so doing, each one believed that he was protecting his good health.

There were some people who thought that living moderately and avoiding any excess might help a great deal in resisting this disease, so they gathered in small groups and lived entirely apart from everyone else. . . . Others thought the opposite: they believed that drinking excessively, enjoying life, going about singing and celebrating, and satisfying in every way the appetites as best one could, laughing, and making light of everything that happened was the best medicine for such a dis-

ease. . . . And in this great affliction and misery of our city the revered authority of the laws, both divine and human, had fallen and almost completely disappeared, for like other men, the ministers and executors of the laws were either dead or sick or so short of help that it was impossible for them to fulfill their duties. . . .

Others were of a crueler opinion (though it was, perhaps, a safer one): they maintained that there was no better medicine against the plague than to flee from it. . . . This disaster had struck such fear into the hearts of men and women that brother abandoned brother, uncle abandoned nephew, sister left brother, and very often wife abandoned husband and—even worse, almost unbelievable—fathers and mothers neglected to tend and care for their children as if they were not their own. . . . And since the sick were abandoned by their neighbors, their parents, and their friends and there was a scarcity of servants, a practice almost unheard of before spread through the city: when a woman fell sick, . . . she did not mind having a manservant (whoever he might be, no matter how young or old he was), and she had no shame whatsoever in revealing any part of her body to him. . . .

Source: Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella (New York: New American Library, 1982), pp. 6–10

weeks; markets reopened as soon as the death rate began to decline. And within two years tax receipts were back at preplague levels. Below the surface, however, plague, population decline, and religious unrest fueled the economic and social transformations of the late Middle Ages.

### Patterns of Economic Change

In the aftermath of plague, the economy of Europe changed in a number of profound ways. As we will see, Italy's domination of the European economy was challenged by the growth of trade and

manufacturing in many parts of Europe. Further, Italian bankers came to face competition from equally astute local bankers. These changes in the structure of economic life were accompanied by other economic disruptions brought on by plague and population decline.

Discussions of the economy must begin with Italy. It was the fulcrum of the international economy in 1300. Italian merchants sold woolens produced in Flanders and Italy to Arab traders in North Africa, who sold them along the African coast and as far south as the Niger Delta. The Italians used the gold that they collected in payment to buy spices and raw materials in the East, which they resold at the regional fairs of northern Europe.

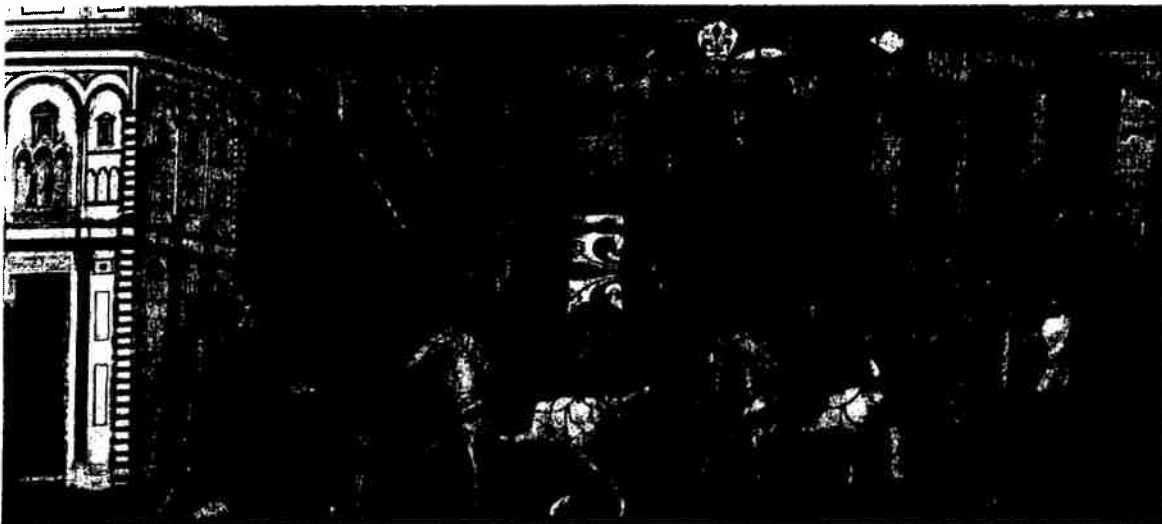
Because of their expertise in moving bullion and goods and their ready sources of capital, Italian merchants like the Ricciardis of Lucca were ideal bankers and financial advisers to the papacy and European kings, who often needed immediate sources of capital. Kings normally were expected to live off their own estates or a series of traditional tolls and duties. They had few cash reserves. In time of war, when they needed money quickly, they tended to trade the rights to various revenues to Italian bankers, who had cash at hand.

Merchants from Cremona, Genoa, Florence, and Siena also forged commercial agreements with the kings of France, Aragon, and Castile and with the papacy. The great merchant-banking houses consisted of loose associations with agents in most of the cities of Europe. In the course of their operations they developed a network of couriers to move business mail, as well as bookkeeping procedures and techniques for the quick transfer of funds over long distances.

The most powerful bank in fifteenth-century Europe was the Medici bank of Florence. Founded in 1397 by Giovanni de' Medici (1360–1429), the bank grew quickly because of its role as papal banker. Medici agents transferred papal revenues from all parts of Europe to Rome and managed papal alum mines, which provided an essential mineral to the growing cloth industry. Cosimo de' Medici (1389–1464), son and successor of Giovanni, formed his bank as a series of bilateral partnerships with easily controlled junior partners in other parts of Europe.

The dramatic career of the Frenchman Jacques Coeur (1395?–1456) demonstrated that by the mid-fifteenth century, Italian merchants were not the only ones who understood international trade. Af-

**The Feast of Saint John the Baptist** John the Baptist was the patron saint of Florence. Each year a procession in his honor included government officials, the great associations and guilds in the city, and representatives from surrounding villages. (*Scala/Art Resource, NY*)



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ter making a fortune trading in southern France, Coeur managed the French royal mint and became the financial adviser of King Charles VII (r. 1422–1461). He put the French monarchy back on a solid financial footing after the Hundred Years' War, becoming in the process the wealthiest individual in France. Unsurprisingly, his wealth and influence earned him jealous enemies: He was accused of murdering the king's mistress, trading with Muslims, and stealing royal funds. In 1451 his property was confiscated, and he was jailed for a short time. He later led a papal expedition against the Turks in the Aegean, where he died.

International trade flourished in other areas besides Italy and France. By the end of the fifteenth century, Italians faced increased competition from local merchants and never managed to penetrate beyond the Rhine in Germany. Italian expertise was least influential in those regions of Europe touching the North and Baltic Seas, areas most noted for fishing (a critical source of protein for much of Europe), salt, grain, and furs. The Hanseatic League, an association of over a hundred trading cities centered on the German city of Lübeck, dominated northern commerce. By 1358 it was referred to as a "League of German Cities," and individual merchants could participate only if they were citizens of one of the member towns. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries the Hansa towns controlled grain shipments from eastern Europe to England and Scandinavia. The league's domination waned in the second half of the fifteenth century, however, as trade diversified. Dutch, English, and even south German merchants took shares of the wool, grain, and fur trades. Towns in the eastern Baltic found that their interests no longer coincided with those of the Rhineland towns that made up the Hanseatic League. Wrocław (in modern Poland) signaled the nature of the change when it resigned from the league in 1474 to expand trade connections with the south German towns.

In contrast to Hanseatic merchants, south Germans adopted Italian techniques of trade, manufacture, and finance to expand their influence throughout central Europe. Their favored trade routes ran through Nuremberg and farther east to Wrocław and into Lithuania and were as important as the northern routes controlled by the Hanseatic League. German merchants regularly bought spices in the markets of Venice and distrib-

uted them in central and eastern Europe. By the fifteenth century, the townsmen of south Germany also produced linen and cotton cloth, which found ready markets in central and eastern Europe.

The Fugger family of Augsburg in southern Germany, the most prosperous of the German commercial families, exemplifies this economic transformation. Hans Fugger (1348–1409) moved to Augsburg from a nearby village in the 1360s and quickly established himself as a weaver and wool merchant. By the 1470s, Hans's grandson, Jacob Fugger (1459–1525), was a dominant figure in the spice trade and also participated in a number of unusually large loans to a succession of German princes. They became leaders in the Tyrolean silver-mining industry, which expanded dramatically in the late fifteenth century. And in the early sixteenth century they handled all transfers of money from Germany to the papacy. Jacob Fugger's wealth increased fourfold between 1470 and 1500. The Fuggers were indispensable allies of the German emperors. Jacob himself ensured the election of Charles V as Holy Roman emperor in 1519, making a series of loans that allowed Charles to buy the influence that he needed to win election.

As wealthy as the great merchants were, in most parts of Europe, prosperity was still tied to agriculture and the production of food grains. In northern and western Europe, foodstuffs were produced on the manorial estates of great churchmen and nobles. These estates were worked by a combination of serfs who owed a variety of labor services and day laborers who were hired during planting and harvesting. In the aftermath of plague and population decline, landlords and employers found themselves competing for the reduced number of laborers who had survived the plague. In 1351 the English crown issued the Statute of Laborers, which pegged wages and the prices of commodities at preplague levels. According to the statute, regulation was necessary because laborers "withdrew themselves from serving great men and others unless they have living [in food] and wages double or treble of what they were [before the plague]." Government attempts to stabilize prices and control wages had little effect, however. Many large landowners gave up direct farming of their estates and instead leased out lands to independent peasant farmers, who, for the most part, worked their lands with family labor. In southwest Germany some landowners reforested



their lands, hoping to take advantage of rising prices for timber and charcoal. In both cases, landlords reduced their dependence on laborers.

Cloth manufacture, not agriculture, was the part of the European economy that changed most dramatically in the late Middle Ages. First in Flanders, then later in Italy, England, and the rest of Europe, production shifted from urban workshops to the countryside. Industries in rural areas tended to be free of controls on quality or techniques. As a result, the production of light, cheap woollens, for which there was a significant demand, moved out of the cities and into the countryside. Rural production, whether in Flanders, Lombardy, or England, became the most dynamic part of the industry.

Rural cloth production, especially in southwest Germany and parts of England, was organized through the putting-out system. Merchants who owned the raw wool contracted with various artisans in the city, suburbs, or countryside—wherever the work could be done most cheaply—to process the wool into cloth. Rural manufacture was least expensive because it could be done as occasional or part-time labor by farmers, their wives, or children during slack times of the day or season. Because production was likely to be finished in the countryside (beyond guild supervision), the merchant was free to move the cloth to wherever it could most easily and profitably be sold; guild masters had no control over price or quality.

Two other developments also changed the woolen trade of the fifteenth century: the rise of Spain as an exporter of unprocessed wool and the emergence of England, long recognized as a source of prime wool, as a significant producer of finished cloth. Spain was an ideal region for the pasturing of livestock. Flocks of sheep regularly moved from mountainous summer pastures onto the plain in the late fall and winter. By the fifteenth century, highly prized Spanish wool from merino sheep was regularly exported to Italy, Flanders, and England. By 1500 there were over 3 million sheep in Castile alone, and revenues from duties on wool formed the backbone of royal finance.

In England, in contrast, economic transformation was tied to cloth production. Over the course of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, wool exports declined as cloth exports rose. In 1350 the English exported just over 5000 bolts of cloth. By the 1470s exports had risen to 63,000 bolts, and

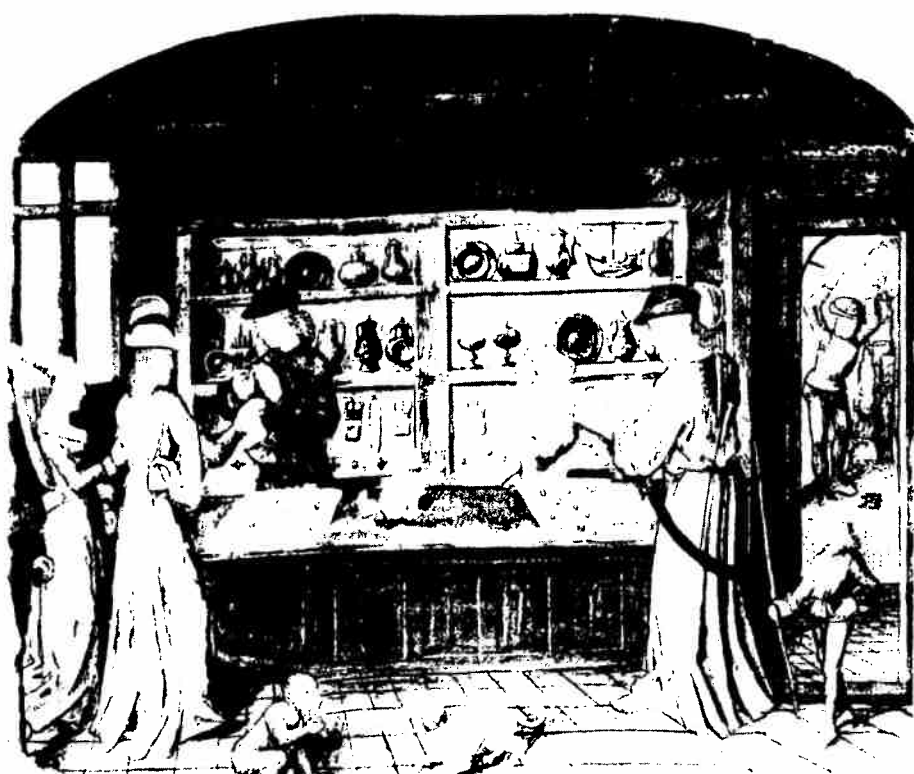
they doubled again by the 1520s. The growth of cloth exports contributed to the expansion of London. Located on the Thames River and easily reached by sea, the city was ideally placed to serve as both a political and an economic capital. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, English commerce became increasingly controlled by London merchant-adventurers. Soon after 1500, over 80 percent of the cloth for export passed through the hands of the Londoners. This development, coupled with the rise of London as a center of administration and consumption, laid the foundation for the economic and demographic growth that would make London the largest and most prosperous city in western Europe by the eighteenth century.

All these patterns of economic change in the fifteenth century challenged customs and institutions by allowing new entrepreneurs into the marketplace. Patricians in many European towns, however, acted to dampen competition and preserve traditional values. Great banking families like the Medicis of Florence tended to avoid competition and concentrations of capital, because the leaders of rival banks were political and social peers. Not even the Medicis used political influence to create advantages for their own businesses. In northern Europe, governments in towns like Leiden restricted the concentration of resources in the hands of the town's leading cloth merchants. Their aim was to ensure full employment for the town's laborers, political power for the guild masters, and social stability in the town.

Full employment was the goal for men only, however. Opportunities for women declined significantly in the fifteenth century. Although men had controlled the guilds and most crafts in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, women in England and many other parts of northern Europe had been actively involved in the local economy. Unlike southern Europe, where women had no public roles, some northern towns apparently even had women's guilds to protect their members' activities as artisans and even peddlers. Because they often worked before marriage, townswomen in northern Europe tended to marry at a later age than did women in Italy. Many women even earned their own marriage dowries. Since they had their own sources of income and often managed the shop of a deceased husband, women could be surprisingly independent. They were un-

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**Women at Work** Although guild records tended to ignore the contributions of women, many women worked in their husband's shop. In this miniature, a woman is selling jewelry. Widows often managed the shops they inherited. (*Bibliothèque Nationale*)

der less pressure to remarry at the death of a spouse. Although their economic circumstances varied considerably, up to a quarter of the households in northern towns like Bern or Zurich were headed by women—almost entirely independent widows.

The fifteenth century brought new restrictions into women's lives. In England, for example, brewing ale had been a highly profitable part-time activity that women often combined with the running of a household. Ale was usually produced in small batches for household use and whatever went unconsumed would be sold. The introduction of beer changed matters. Because hops were added to beer as a preservative, it was easier to produce, store, and transport in large batches. Beer brewing became a highly profitable full-time trade, reducing the demand for the alewife's product and providing work for men as beer-makers.

At the same time the rights of women to work in urban crafts and industries were reduced. Wealthy fathers became less inclined to allow wives and daughters to work outside the home. Guilds banned the use of female laborers in many trades and severely limited the right of a widow to supervise her spouse's shop. For reasons that are not entirely clear, journeymen objected to working alongside women—perhaps because they now saw their status as employees as permanent instead of temporary. By the early sixteenth century, journeymen in Germany considered it "dishonorable" for a woman to work in a shop, even the daughter or wife of the master.

Despite the narrowing of economic opportunities for women, the overall economic prospects of peasants and laborers improved. Lowered rents and increased wages in the wake of plague meant a higher standard of living for small farmers and



laborers. Before the plague struck in 1348, when grain prices were high and wages relatively low, most poor Europeans had subsisted on bread or grain-based gruel, consuming meat, fish, and cheese only a few times a week. A well-off peasant in England had lived on a daily ration of about two pounds of bread and a cup or two of oatmeal porridge washed down with three or four pints of ale; poorer peasants generally drank water except on very special occasions. After the plague, laborers were more prosperous. Adults in parts of Germany may have consumed nearly a liter of wine and a third of a pound of meat along with a pound or more of bread each day. Elsewhere people could substitute an equivalent portion of beer, ale, or cider for the wine. Hard times for landlords were good times for peasants and day laborers.

Landlords in England responded to their economic difficulties by converting their lands to grazing in order to produce for the growing woolen market and to reduce their need for labor. In parts of Italy, they invested in canals, irrigation, and new crops in order to increase profits. In eastern Europe, where landlords were able to take advantage of political and social unrest to force tenants into semi-free servile status, there was increased emphasis on commercial grain farming. This so-called second serfdom created an impoverished work force whose primary economic activity was in the lord's fields. Increasingly in the second half of the century, grains raised in Poland and Prussia found their way to markets in England and the Low Countries. Europe east of the Elbe River became a major producer of grain, but at a heavy social cost.

The loss of perhaps a third of the urban population due to the plague had serious consequences in the towns of Europe. Because of lower birthrates and higher death rates, late medieval towns needed a constant influx of immigrants in order to expand or even to maintain their population. Citizenship in most towns was restricted to masters in the most important guilds, and it was they who controlled government. In many towns, citizens constructed a system of taxation that worked to their own economic advantage and fell heavily on artisans and peasants. It was the masters of the most important guilds who were able to define working conditions in the industrialized trades, fields like metalworking and cloth production. Unskilled laborers and members of craft guilds de-

pendent for their economic well-being on personal relationships with powerful citizens who controlled the government and the markets. Peace and order in towns and in the countryside depended on a delicate balance of the interests of the well-to-do and the more humble—a balance easily destroyed by war, plague, and economic depression.

### The Popular Revolts

The balance first broke in the 1330s, unleashing a wave of violence across Europe radically different from the violence of previous centuries. Private wars, vendettas, and popular outbursts had erupted in other times, but the violence, drama, and impact of the risings of the fourteenth century remain unique. Some of the revolts seemed directed at the remnants of the old feudal and manorial elites. In that respect they were, as some historians have maintained, merely "a high point in the struggle between landlords and tenants that had been going on at a local and uncoordinated level for at least two hundred years."<sup>10</sup> Urban revolts, however, often seemed to be popular revolutions against exploitation by the patricians and guild masters who dominated local politics and controlled the local economy. In nearly all cases, the popular risings against authorities seem to have been triggered by the breakdown of the traditional bonds that had been holding society together.

The first disturbances occurred in the industrial towns of Flanders during the 1330s. Flemish wealth was based on the manufacture of woolen cloth, which was dominated by the weavers of the towns of Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres. In 1338, just as the first battles of the Hundred Years' War were being waged, James van Artevelde was elected "captain," or emergency leader, of Ghent through the support of laborers and artisans who feared the weavers. Faced with the opposition of the local count, hostility from the other towns, and rising discontent in Ghent itself, van Artevelde found himself increasingly isolated. He was assassinated in July 1345 by local faction leaders, in an act that was as much a personal vendetta as a political statement. Politics in Ghent quickly reverted to its traditional pattern: The well-to-do were again in control.

In the aftermath of war and plague, urban and rural risings also broke out in France. Following

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the French disaster at Poitiers in 1356, Étienne Marcel, provost or director of the merchants of Paris, mobilized a protest movement. He advocated ordinances that resembled a French Magna Carta, providing that royal officials should be subject to the Estates General and that the Estates should control taxation. This revolution seemed too radical to conservative townsmen in the provinces. Marcel's only allies were bands of rebellious countrymen roaming the region around Paris. The rural movement, or *jacquerie* (the name comes from *jacque*, French for the "jacket" typically worn by peasants), began in response to long-standing economic and political grievances in the countryside that had been worsened by warfare. The rebels and eventually Marcel himself were isolated and then defeated by aristocratic armies.

Two decades after the defeat of the French rebels, Europe again experienced insurrections. But the risings of the 1370s and 1380s differed from the previous revolts in several significant ways. Political unrest now was much more broadly based than it had been. There were political revolutions in many German towns as members of lowly artisan guilds claimed the right to sit alongside patricians in urban governments.

In 1378 a dramatic revolt occurred in central Italy. In reaction to a costly Florentine war with the papacy, the Ciompi, unskilled workers in the woolen industry, led a popular revolution hoping to expand participation in government and limit the authority of the guild masters over semiskilled artisans and day laborers. Barely six weeks after the Ciompi risings, however, wealthy conservatives quashed the new guilds and exiled or executed the leaders of the movement, leaving political and economic power even more firmly in the hands of the patricians.

Not long after the destruction of the Ciompi, England was rocked by the Rising of 1381, often called the Peasants' Revolt despite the fact that townsmen as well as peasants participated. England seethed with unrest as a result of plague, landlord claims for traditional dues, and finally a poll tax that placed a heavy burden on the common people. To most, it seemed that England's fiscal and political problems were the responsibility of the king's evil advisers, who the poor believed supported the ambitions of the wealthy. The heart of

the uprising was a revolt by rural peasants and artisans in the southeast, primarily in Kent and Essex. Popular armies led by Wat Tyler (d. 1381), who may have had some military experience, converged on London in June 1381. Tyler was murdered during a dramatic meeting with Richard II outside London, and a reaction against the rebels quickly ensued. (See the box, "The Rising of 1381.")

Most of the revolts had few lasting consequences, for the elites quickly regained control. A series of revolts in Spain, however, had long-lasting and unfortunate effects on Iberian society. In 1391 an attack on the Jews of Seville led to murders, forced conversions, and suppression of synagogues throughout Spain. In the aftermath large portions of the urban Jewish population either converted to Christianity or moved into villages away from the large commercial cities. The Jewish population in Castile may have declined by a fourth. Although the anti-Jewish feelings were expressed in religious terms, the underlying cause was anger over the economic prominence of some Jewish or *converso* (recently converted Jewish-Christian) families. After 1391, anti-Jewish feeling increasingly became racial. As one rebel said, "The converso remains a Jew and therefore should be barred from public office."<sup>11</sup> Antagonism against Jews and conversos continued to build until the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (see page 429).

## FORMATION OF THE OTTOMAN AND SPANISH EMPIRES

In both Iberia and the eastern Mediterranean, political integration in the fifteenth century occurred because of political changes undreamed in previous centuries. The rise of the Ottoman Empire and the unification of Spain created the two powers around which politics and diplomacy would revolve in sixteenth-century Europe.

### The Ottoman Turks

In 1453, the Muslim Ottoman Turks breached the walls of Constantinople, killed Emperor Constantine XI (r. 1448–1453), and destroyed the last vestiges of the Byzantine Empire and the Roman imperial tradition that reached back to the emperor